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IF JUDGMENT COMES

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if judgment comes

A Poem by
Alfred Noyes

With drawings by
John Alan Maxwell

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IF JUDGMENT COMES

IF JUDGMENT COMES

You stand there, in the dock, before the world
For Judgment, with the froth of your last lie
White on your lips, the red blood on your hands;
The blood of children plastered on your boots;
The blood of women, dust of their rubbled
homes,
The fragments of their shattered skulls, whence
eyes
Once looked out softly, splatterings of their flesh,
Wisps of their hair, the golden and the grey
Clinging about you, while you whine to heaven
And hell that men misjudge you.

This Assize

Is held, then, on a somewhat higher hill
Where all appeals are heard.

With a strange courage,
Despite your whining, in the self-same breath
You ask for absolute justice. Few on earth
Would dare to ask for that. Most men on earth,
Yes, even your judges, know their deepest need
Is for redemption, the forgiving grace
Of God, without which most of us were lost.
But you—heroically complete it seems,
In your own armour—stand there in the dock,
Clicking your heels for justice, and no more;
Strict and meticulous justice.

You shall have it,
Weighed and impartial, down to the last grain.

First, let us see you, simply as you are,
Out of the limelight, with no well-dressed crowd
To hoist you skyward, crying their "All Hail,"
In the old fashion, "those about to die
Salute you."

By your own false test of race,
You have missed the points of Nordic super-man,



In all externals. Had we to guess your part
On the world's stage, you hardly would be cast
For statesman, lawyer, doctor, soldier, priest;
But some would cast you, rightly enough on looks,
As bully to a prostitute; the pale,
Blackmailing type of injured *maquereau*,
Ready to compromise for trifling sums
Then bleed his foolish victim to the death.
This for externals. Yet the cockney eye
Misjudged you, finding comedy in the lank
Straight forelock over the narrow stunted brow,
The abrupt small lip-tuft, and that rigid stare.

Others misjudged you in whose eyes you seemed
The cheap theatrical type of criminal,
Who comes so often handcuffed to the dock
For blind neurotic murder; vain as hell;
Vain of the belted raincoat, daubed with blood,
Held up in court as evidence against him;
Vain of the limelight poured on his white face



By the world's horror, while the jury breathes
The verdict Guilty and the judge assumes
The Black Cap, and the court is hushed to hear
The verdict, *Death*.

Some streaks of this were in you;
The pseudo-modern "genius," pleased to read
Hysterical messages, at the gallow's foot,
From sex-mad women, and see his *Great Romance*
Blazoned with headlines in the yellower press,

Which swears his last mad letter to the friend
Whose throat he cut was worthy of Othello,
And thinks his last wild phrase—*I shall be
lightning—*

A master-stroke of genius, from the depths
Of the subconscious mind. This, as we know,
Is mightier than the conscious mind today;
Ends reason, makes a bubble of right and wrong,
And sets Art raving. In that witches' cauldron,
As bogus intellectuals taught your young,
The incestuous nightmares of the Inferno mix,
Coil and uncoil and breed, till Chaos comes
And fair is foul, once more, and foul is fair.

All this prepared your wild hypnotic way
For all the flock of charlatans who misused
The name of Science, under the cloak of Freud,
Breaking all barriers down 'twixt right and wrong
Until the child began almost to see
Hecate leering through its mother's face,
And Masoch, kissing Christ, crowned the vile
work

That Nietzsche, raving in his madman's cell
Against the one stark Sign that saves the world,
Bequeathed to the blond Beast. Psychologists,
For whom the living soul had bolts and screws,
Took the blind engine screw by screw apart
For "readjustment"—not redemption, now—
And, working in the dark, where none can work,
With diagrams of the soul's machinery,
Taught the new bogus teachers how to make
Their automatic robots of mankind,
Emotions and affections all controlled
By propaganda, answering at once
To the right disk inserted in the slot,
Ready to click their heels at the right lie,
And march, to Wagner's music, anywhere.

That—that was music's peril; and your own;
(For you loved Wagner). Music, which was once
The glory of your country, had become
Its peril, too. For music still escapes
The net of definite thought. Your men can march



In all directions to a crash of sound,
And think that God inspires them as they go;
Can march on any road, the right or wrong,
Through Flanders, or through France, to the same
tune,
And mix the rhythm of their earth-shaking boots,
Or crash of falling cities in the night,
With Haydn's hymn, and *Deutschland über Alles*,
And thunderings of the *Götterdämmerung*,
And Thor's barbaric hammer.

All this prepared

Your way before you came. A blind assault
In every country, on a world-wide front
Against the eternal values, once enshrined
In the one Faith of Christendom, had begun;
A blind assault, led on by little men,
The fools who, in their hearts, abolished God,
The pseudo-modern mob of "intellectuals"
Who always seem to lack that useful gift
Intelligence.

Egged on by shrewder men,
These, too, prepared the way for the new chaos;
Where, as your exiled German, Thomas Mann,
Has told us, every envy of the pit
Can march beneath the red flag of revolt;
For "Social Justice" in an "intellectual"
Too often means injustice to the rest,
Too often means a lust for the mob's vote,
A chance to pull your hated rival down,
Or power to smash the ten commandments up,
And take your comrade's wife, your comrade's
house,
And everything that's his.

This blind assault,
Abolishing every code of right and wrong;
This monstrous wave of evil thought which flowed
Through Art and Letters, hailed by all the fools
Of fashion, poisoning the most vital springs
Of human life, had long prepared your way.

Around it all, along a world-wide front,
As one true voice in Canada averred,

There hung an ugly pathologic taint,
As though our civilization, at its height,
Were being attacked by hordes of vicious morons,
Maliciously delighting in their power
To infect the world with their own foul disease.

In every land this movement had its way,
And England sinned, as other lands have sinned.
You saw it, and you loathed it. In *Mein Kampf*
You wrote your verdict on it. You despised
That wave of madness. But, as you now ride
That other redder wave which, once, you loathed,
Calling it the foul scum of the wide world,
Hitler, you rode its crest.

Had you but been the thing that you despised,
The blood that greased your boots had surely
 dulled
The lustre of that insular English grin,
That insular wit which makes a jest of you
Still, as it always did.

We know too well,
Too late, how we—your enemy—sinned in this.
Our little insular world has grinned too long.
The gutters run with too much blood for grins;
There are too many grins across the graves
Of children; and the “Humour of this War”
Parroted over luncheons, dinners, teas,
Perhaps to keep God’s courage up, and Christ’s,
While children, by the hands of men, are drowned
Or smashed like vermin, stales upon the soul.

We know too well how many an oaf of ours
Announced by grins to Mussolini’s face
That “foreigners are fools.” We know too well
How many have erred in laughing at you, Hitler.
How could you know their ancient English trick
Of laughing at themselves? They erred more
gravely

(Long before Abyssinia) when they grinned
At both your good and evil, treating both,
With all that you could think or say or do,

As equal symptoms of absurdity,
Summed up for history and symbolized
In Mussolini's jaw and outstretched hand,
(Long before Abyssinia) with your own
Forelock and lip-tuft. Both of you were mad.
They said it, and misjudged you.
We know what lies have riddled the world's press.
We know how many in England, and elsewhere,
Have sinned in this.

Those English caricatures
Could sting you, as injustice. Cockney humour
Leapt on its prey too soon. It never saw
The man behind the mask, the rigid mask
Of that unsmiling face; the unswerving eyes
Fixed in that steadfast cataleptic stare
On their one aim, or—if that aim should fail—
Fixed on the horror of a Gorgon's head
Whose hair rose, hissing, into rattlesnakes
And turned you into stone.

What was that aim?
Ambition? Power? Your own aggrandisement?
Never! You asked for Justice. You shall have it.

You loved your country, Hitler.
You loved your country, after your own fashion.
You had seen your country beaten to its knees
And humbled to the dust. You thought her
 wronged;
You had seen her on the verge of victory, matched
Against a world in arms; then, at such odds,
As earth had never known, you had watched her
 fall,
Defeated, crushed; her strong men in her streets
Fainting for lack of food; and those black troops
Quartered upon your women.
 You raised her up;
And found her still an outlaw. You desired
To win the world's respect for her again.
You made her mighty; and held out your hand
To France; and France, remembering her dead,
Blind to the future, gave you her reply
By spitting in it.



You had made your country mighty, and you
marched

Into the Rhineland, winning back your own
Without a blow, whereby you broke a law
Imposed on you by others, who themselves
As we have seen, not always hold to truth,
And hardly kept their pledges at Versailles.

Once more you held your hand out; and this time
Many believed you meant it.

You offered to disarm and join the League.
But some—who had read your book—*Mein
Kampf*—perhaps;
Took you at your own word; suspected you;
Ignored the outstretched hand.

So, to man's doom,

The chances overlap; the moment comes
And passes; and may never come again.
Your delegates stood like felons in the dock,
To hear the sentence of Versailles renewed
And lengthened by eight years.

From that dark hour,

When something in you snapped,
And you had no more faith, believed no more
In anything but the goal of Germany,
Which must be won by force, or not at all;
By force, though every economic good
Might have been won by reason and good-will,
Your face became the rigid mask we know.

We had missed a chance, perhaps, to save the
world.

Perhaps. And yet; and yet; you wrote *Mein
Kampf*.

Versailles, God knows, had all been wrong enough,
If this thing had begun then, at Versailles.



But you, in turn, forgot the long red road
That brought your blinded people all the way,
Goose-stepping to Versailles, through Flanders
fields,
Goose-stepping to Versailles, through murdered
France,

Goose-stepping to Versailles, through crime on
crime,

Goose-stepping to Versailles across the graves
Of innocent millions whose whole heart's one care
Was just to make what Scotland's poet called
"A happy fire-side clime for weans and wife!"

World-power or Downfall was your land's refrain.
It rings through all her false philosophers.

So—on those innocent breasts the Prussian heels
Ground; the blood spurted; and men turned to
beasts,

Raping and shooting, shovelling out of sight
Men, women, children, simple peasant souls,
Not plutocrats like Goebbels or yourself,
With Berchtesgadens towering in the hills,
But folk who tilled the soil and bowed their heads
And crossed themselves when Angelus was rung.
They are all forgotten now.

But history—sometimes—from her blood-stained
rags

Furtively draws a curious tattered book
Called, once, *The Bryce Report*—

A tale of crime,
That devils might have whispered, once, in hell;
Crime planned by statesmen in their polished
hats,

And well-cut suits, turned out by the best tailors;
Statesmen who led great nations, the fine flower
Of western civilization, and all time.

They used to lie, and cheat, and plan to kill
Their neighbors in their sleep; they would discuss
The poisoning of wells; bacterial war;
The sinking of the ships of friendly nations,
Leaving no traces, so that none could know
The criminal, and all alike could wear
The mask of friendship still.

This was the ground
That brought you into being, Hitler; you
The unhappy symbol of your land's disease,
Which still bids fair, now, to infect the world.

* * * * *

The ground was well prepared.

* * * * *

There is a Monster, an unnatural thing,
All eyes, ears, tongues and slippery tentacles,
That wakes at midnight in the murderous heart
Of cities.

Poisonous, formless as a fog,
It crouches, oozes, squats, contracts and spreads,
Like a gigantic Spider in its lair,
The dusky centre of an unseen Web
Whose league-long threads enmesh a hundred
realms;
And, through this Web, the Monster rules the
world.

Clutching those intricate, quick, invisible lines,
The Monster feels them quivering with strange
news

Flashed from the murmuring cities, near and far.
Then all its nerves grow young. Its lustful eyes
Brighten like myriads of electric sparks;
And its bloat body swells to feel the throb
Of distant creatures trapped. Through those thin
clues

To agony and death it sucks new life;
Feeds on the tremors of a world in pain;
Hears the last words that prophets died to speak,
And breathes them out, for all the world to hear;
But not the same . . .

Never the same . . . for every word it breathes
Puts on chameleon colours that still change
To suit the Monster's mood. So every man
Waking, bewildered, in a waking dream
Believes that he has caught a glimpse of truth;
Thinks as the Monster whispered him to think;
Says what the Monster whispered him to say;
Sees only what the Monster lets him see.



Then watch it, with a cloud of octopus ink,
Darkening the mind of nations, breathing hate,
Between the shepherd on his island hills
And the grape-gatherer on the Tuscan plains;
Till the dread moment when one lawless hand
Destroys a bond (whereon the Monster sheds
Its own distorting light), and multitudes
Who never shared the guilt, or read the bond,
Or knew it had been made, or had the power
To make or break the bond, are subtly stirred
Through all their poisoned veins, and suddenly
 roused
(On both sides, in Thy name, O God of Truth!)
To drench a thousand quiet summer fields
With blood as warm and innocent as their own.



And then—the Monster mourns the unknown
dead;
And murmurs of the Supreme Sacrifice;
And, in a little while, grows tired of it;
And, when their graves are gathering green again,
Declares their noblest Victory spelt Defeat,
And twenty million lives were spent in vain.

But, while the Monster fills the world with this,
Half of its poisonous tongues, in undertone,
Proclaim the deadlier and the bloodier War
That shall make men more bestial than the beasts,
And hurl their children, a blind holocaust,
Thro' hell's own fire, to Moloch.

While earth waits
This consummation, a remembering few,
A few remembering faces, drained of hope,
Stare through the dark.

But, when the Monster hears
Their cry—how long?—it cuts that quivering line
And hisses through its Web:

*Drown that dull sound!
Let the band play! Let all the hells run loose!
Divide and rule! Rule, and divide the world!*

Those things explain your monstrous growth of
power,
But nothing can defend it. You stand there,
Mein Kampf beneath your arm,
Your testament, the portrait of your mind,
And those who know what books are, know that
here
With this same tenth-rate key a tenth-rate mind
Unlocked its tenth-rate hoard; the gangster code;
World-wisdom of a street-bred Machiavelli,
Proud of his new-found technique of the lie,
Explaining its advantages; that it takes
Suddenly, off their guard, those “bourgeois” souls

Who keep their contracts, and pretend to think
That even genius sometimes lives by law.
Hypocrites! For you told them in *Mein Kampf*,
You had renounced that bourgeois virtue, truth;
You had set it down, in print, for all to read;
And you felt sure, in their new pagan world,
All realists would admire you, the Great Man,
Who, in his cunning net of lies, could trap
Those average human beings whom God loves.
Perhaps, as Lincoln thought, He loves them best
Because He made so many of them, and died
Upon the cross to save them, in that tale,
That curious bourgeois tale,
Which Europe once held true, and some hold
still.

But you're a realist, as your book unfolds:
And you have said "Goodbye to all of that,"
Abandoned fables, and embraced the lie,
Made it the basis of "real politics."
If it be true, you wrote, so much the better.
But, if untrue, it must no less be said.



So, for the tenth-rate “realistic” fool
For whom there is no God, falsehood itself
Becomes the real, and all that ever gave
Value to human character or worth
To human souls, in God’s sight, or in man’s,
For you, the realist, was an irised bubble;
Its last exponent, in the practical world,
A British fool, who carried an umbrella.
And yet, and yet, *Mein Kampf* beneath your arm,
Proclaiming all the values of a lie,
Boasting yourself a liar, setting forth
The advantages of lying, you stand there
Incarnate Innocence, wondering why the world
Misjudges you, the victim of a plot;
Encircled; all your truth misunderstood!

And now, the man who called himself a liar
Finds that a cruel world at last believes him;
And, worse, far worse, for, when it comes to
deeds,
Your every act, though written plain enough

In large red letters for the world to read,
Your every act, from murdering your own friends
To ravaging little nations in the night,
Has been misjudged and misinterpreted.
For whom should a man kill, if not his friends?
And whom should any man rob, if not the weak?
The Jews misunderstood you, when the boots
Of your Gestapo kicked old men to death.
The Czechs misunderstood you when you crossed
Their frontiers and came killing through the dark.
Poland misunderstood you, when the sky
Rained fire on poor men's huts and Warsaw
burned;
And wives were torn from husbands; and their
sons,
Cattle-trucked into slavery, were lost
To all they loved for ever. From that bourne,
More dreadful far than death, no traveller
On those dark trains has ever yet returned.
Denmark misunderstood you, when cold steel
And cold revolver muzzles suddenly thrust



Against her breast. Norway misunderstood you,
Norway, who fed your children, till they bit
The hand that fed them, and you paid her back
With fire and slaughter. Holland misunderstood
you

When gangster hordes rained death on
Rotterdam.

Belgium misunderstood you when her dead
Rose from their graves and stood beside their sons
And died a second time, yet found no peace.
France, France misunderstood you, when her dead
Buried her dead, and laid them down to die
Living, in worse than death.

England misunderstood you, when a cry
Went up in mid-Atlantic, the small sound
Of children's voices, struggling in the dark.

That ship was sailing Westward, and you knew
Only too well, what innocent lives it bore.
No lie about munitions saves you here.

Had you but stopped it; let the boats be
 launched;
As all the world knows England would have done,
America would have done, (or if you say
You do not know it, even your own black heart
Knows that your tongue is lying) in that case
We might—almost—have praised you. But you
 chose
Deliberately to murder those whom Christ
Chose for his kingdom, and for ever now
England will see, at midnight, in her sleep
Far down, far down, beneath the engulfing sea,
Those shadowy forms, like angels, “with bright
 hair,
Dabbled in blood.”

But worse than even their murder,
At once, at once, Berlin was on the air,
With the most foul assault upon the soul
That earth has ever known: “THIS THING WILL
 MAKE
A GOOD TEAR-JERKING STORY!”

That was your new psychologist—the cold
And calculating devil at his last,
Coldest, and most deliberate assault
Upon the human soul.
The ground was well prepared. The modern world,
As we have seen, had learned its lesson well.
Brutality was strength; all tenderness
Lack of sophistication; but this last
Intimidation of the soul of man,
Daring it to be anything but “tough,”
Daring it to defy the gangster’s code,
Almost before the last thin cry had died
On the salt wind, the last small clutching hand
Thrust from the swallowing wave its last appeal
To the lost loving hand that was not there,
This was the sin of sins, which Christ himself
Once branded with his lightning.

Last, last, and strangest mystery of all,
America, it seems, misunderstood
How you, Great Man, for all your Master-mind,

So innocently and utterly unprepared,
So weak in raw materials, so crushed
By economic hardships, and so poor;
Could overrun ten nations in five months.
For, as you bragged, your democratic foes,
Were inefficient, ill-equipped, unready,
Therefore you crushed them; yet, in the same
 breath
You pictured them preparing your destruction,
Encircling you, the incarnate Innocence.

*If it be true, you wrote, so much the better.
If it be false, it must no less be said.*

There, in those words, you wrote your country's
 doom,
And—had you been victorious—would have
 sealed
The doom of half mankind.

There, in those words,

The last abyss yawned at the feet of man,
To engulf all values, human and divine.

One only task remains for all mankind—
To vindicate the majesty of Truth,
That attribute of God;
And Conscience that bears witness to the Truth
In the blind breast of man; Conscience that
proves
Man's kinship with the Eternal, and prefers
Death to surrender of its glimpse of right,
Loss of all else to loss of that one good;
Conscience, whose last imperatives reveal
The ultimate nature of the Soul of things,
Above the State, above the universe,
Immanent, yet transcending all things made,
The Supreme Being, God.

The name of "War"
Is but a name today, a cheating cloak
For murder of the helpless multitude,

By monsters in high places. If the Right
Is Right, and worthy of honour among men
As right, for ever, this crime must be brought
home.

If not, the lesser murderers who die
Ten deaths a week, may with a dirty laugh
Wipe out the name of Justice.

There is no room
For "reparations" now. Who can repay
Those little children dead? What gold, what gear,
What boundary lines; what landmark re-removed?
Better that not one word of all these things
Be breathed on earth, and this one crime brought
home;

That, in the sight of all men, for all time,
This crime be marked as crime, and men believe
Once more in Justice; men believe once more
In Right; believe no grasp of the machine
Seized by whatever cunning, can endow
The criminal with a power above the law

To order deaths by myriads, and to write
His name in "history," one of its "Great Men."

If others be found guilty, on your side,
Or ours—or ours—then, in the name of God
And Truth, the world must see this crime brought
home.

This is no war for blind material things.
This war is fought along a world-wide front
Within the mind of man; and there can be
No victory now but on that field of thought.
Bombs, aeroplanes, and cannon fight as well
For falsehood as for truth. They are neutrals all.
Thought only can decide; and, on that field,
This world-crime must be marked as crime for
ever,
And ended, or man's world itself will end.

* * * * *

When man put out the lantern of the law
How many lights were quenched, the wide world
round?

The ships were shadows, and on every sea
They hurried to dark harbours. Europe blacked
Her street-lamps, and the friendly window-lights
Were doubly blinded, even those lights of home.

Then, in that night, what hideous masquerade
Emerged from obscene kennels? Lust was there
Whinnying, "I am young, rose-breasted Joy";
And Hate was there, proclaiming, "I am Love";
And crapulous Vice and Madness, crowned with
straw

Clamoured, *Bow down and worship. We are
New!*

Then Lie with drunken naked Lie linked hands,
And through the crumbling arches of the State
Danced on the graves of all those quiet dead
Who once had dared to dream that truth was
true;

And lying statesmen, pandering to their hour,
Flattered the mode, and joined the dance of Death,

And Art and Letters mocked at their own toils,
And violently ran down their easier way
To Chaos and Corruption.

Man had quenched
With his own hand, all lights that he could reach,
But not the stars in heaven, and not Thy Light,



O Liberty, nor Thine, whose unseen fire
Still burns on earth, the unfaltering altar-flame
Which tells of things eternal, worlds elsewhere.

Long has one cry come quivering through the
dark:

*A hundred times in this, our modern world,
Millions have reeled upon the brink of war
By one man's evil will.*

*Who shall deliver us from the cold machine
That eats up millions by the will of one?
Where is the true democracy?*

To-night
There comes an answering voice from the New
World:

*Christ never died for governments or laws.
He did not die to build a nation up.
He died for Men, the separate souls of Men.*

THE END

